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Developing a Municipal Performance-Measurement System: Reflections on the Atlanta Dashboard

Under the leadership of Mayor Shirley Franklin, the City of Atlanta introduced a new operating model for municipal government in early 2002. A central component of that effort has been a performance-measurement system—the "Atlanta Dashboard"—designed to assess various aspects of municipal performance and, through that assessment, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal services.

This article describes the development and operation of the Atlanta Dashboard and compares it to similar systems in other cities. We offer this profile in the belief that the Dashboard may be of interest to other municipal governments, to other units of government, and to academics concerned with performance measurement. Although the Dashboard is unlikely to fit perfectly the needs of other cities, an understanding of Atlanta's experience may be useful to other municipalities as they develop or modify their own performance-measurement systems.

Toward that end, this article first describes why the Atlanta Dashboard developed as it did and how it works. We then compare the Dashboard to other "balanced measures" systems that have recently been adopted by or recommended for municipal governments. This comparison will highlight the special challenges that municipalities face in developing performance-measurement systems and suggest how a system such as the Atlanta Dashboard can help to meet these challenges.

By way of full disclosure, this article draws from the different perspectives of its two authors. One of us, a member of Mayor Franklin's cabinet, was the principal architect of the Atlanta Dashboard. The other is a public administration professor who has a long-standing scholarly interest in the performance of municipal governments, as well as a personal interest in the success of his adoptive home of Atlanta. We do not claim to be wholly objective in our analysis, but we believe our different perspectives enable us to offer a balanced description of the Atlanta experience.

Background: The Challenge to a New Mayor

When Shirley Franklin was sworn in as Atlanta's mayor in early 2002, the plight of the city's government was widely perceived as dire. The administration of her predecessor, Bill Campbell, had been reputedly corrupt, with 11

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former administrators under indictment or in prison. A climate of distrust contributed to the public perception that Atlanta's city government was detached from citizens and generally uninterested in delivering basic services in a quality manner.

Beneath these high-visibility problems, the mayor's new administrative team found serious underlying organizational problems as well. In particular, city hall had little idea how well its various units were performing. Little data were being collected and no standard operating reports were being produced. The lack of performance data was clearly going to frustrate any attempts to improve service (see box 1, "The Pothole Posse").

Box 1 The Pothole Posse

Few city services are more basic than filling potholes. In fact, the number of potholes serves as a good barometer for the overall quality of city services—if you can't fill potholes, you probably can't do much else.

Within the first week of the administration, having heard many complaints about potholes, we asked for an estimate of how many potholes were in the streets. The commissioner for public works at the time replied there were 587. We were impressed that he had the number at his fingertips, and with that data in hand the mayor formed and launched her "Pothole Posse"—a small team dedicated exclusively to filling potholes. The posse filled 3,606 potholes in the next three months. Obviously, the pothole problem was significantly larger than anyone in city government had known.

The pothole experience revealed the importance of accurate performance data to effective management. The critical service issues facing the city could not be tackled without systems in place to capture and report on performance. If the pothole problem was so big, how many more surprises were in store for us?

The scarcity of performance data was the most obvious manifestation of a more fundamental problem: the lack of a "performance culture," as Mayor Franklin described it. City employees had few performance targets to reach or goals to accomplish, and consequently they were uninspired. In the last year of the outgoing administration, only 33 of 8,000 employees had been rated "less than effective" on their personnel evaluations, meaning that neither departmental nor individual performance was being evaluated seriously.

Mayor Franklin was far from a novice in municipal government, having served as chief administrative officer during the 1980s under Mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young. Aided by that experience, in the face of this difficult environment she was able to quickly articulate a set of principles that she charged her administrative team with pursuing:

- We serve citizens, and we care about outcomes as experienced by citizens.
- We will be open and transparent.
- We will be effective and efficient.

The Search for a Performance-Measurement System

The centerpiece of the city's pursuit of these principles, the mayor's team agreed, needed to be a new performance-measurement system that could do the following:

- Provide accurate and timely information about the state of city services and operations
- Provide management with operating targets and a means of tracking progress toward those targets in order to increase management accountability
- Provide a public window into the city's operating environment in order to increase transparency, thereby regaining the public's confidence in the competence of the city government.

With these objectives in mind, the mayor's team began by examining the performance-measurement systems used by other governments and by private businesses. According to the Gartner Group, private sector companies spent over $1.5 billion on performance tracking tools in 2003, and cities such as Baltimore and Charlotte, among others, have developed their own systems (see Kaplan 1998), so the team had some examples to look at.

Some Lessons Learned

The private sector clearly has the deepest and richest set of experiences with performance-measurement systems. Still, while private-sector models may be instructive, particularly in terms of the processes used to develop and operate systems, the team concluded that some stark differences between the operating environments prevented those models from being fully applicable to the public sector.

1. *Local government lacks a financial "roll up."* One attribute shared by most private-sector performance-measurement systems is that, regardless of how many measures they employ, at the end of the day overall performance can be summarized with a financial metric. Private-sector organizations, even those encompassing a variety of businesses, share the common bottom-line denominator of profitability. This common denominator allows private firms to compare performance across different operating units using a single, neutral metric. Other metrics may also be used, but the single financial metric of profitability provides an effective means of evaluating performance across multiple entities.

A local government such as Atlanta's, by contrast, cannot roll up its operations into a single metric. As a consequence, a performance-measurement system that would fit Atlanta's situation needed to be looser and more federalist in structure than what a typical private business might use.

2. *Local government lacks a unified culture.* The review of performance-measurement systems used by private companies revealed a common desire to use a single scorecard across the entire enterprise. Companies generally are not interested in developing scorecards tailored to each operating division. Hilton Hotels, for instance, uses a single scorecard for all of its hotel properties.

In homogenous organizations that are focused on a single line of business, this works well. The management team has a philosophy regarding how best to run its business, and this philosophy dictates how the scorecard is structured and what is measured. One can generally discern how an organization views its key to success by the attributes it chooses to measure. In the hospitality industry, customer satisfaction measures take center stage. In manufacturing, measures that gauge business-process efficiency are critical. In services industries, measures involving human capital development are emphasized. In other words, the measures tend to be homogeneous within particular industries and reflect business strategies within individual companies.

Local governments, on the other hand, are heterogeneous enterprises. One could argue that the City of Atlanta, for example, is a conglomerate spanning at least 15 different lines of businesses. These businesses are relatively small but highly diversified in terms of the services they deliver, the business practices that support them, and, perhaps most importantly, the culture underlying their operations. Police departments have a military culture that is hierarchical and focused on command and control. Planning departments have a culture akin to an academic institution with a loosely collegial atmosphere. Public works departments function more like a manufacturing operation, with a blue-collar mentality. This diversity of cultures complicates efforts to design performance-measurement systems because each unit has its own idiosyncratic views on the optimal balance among business process improvement, customer service delivery, technology innovation, and human capital development. Again, that reality points to the need for a more federalist structure in municipal performance-measurement systems.

3. *Local government information is public.* Public access to performance information and the resulting transparency are high priorities for municipal scorecards, but they create issues. With openness comes public scrutiny and accountability, issues the private sector need not confront. Public managers naturally hesitate to reveal all, thereby inviting micromanagement. As well, the more managers must expose to public scrutiny, the more they may be tempted to spin data to make departmental performance appear more positive than it is.

Recognizing these realities, the mayor's team saw the need for a performance-measurement system that could achieve internal management goals while also providing meaningful public access. Private-sector scorecards that are shielded from the public eye could not fully meet this need.

A Local Government Scorecard

With these lessons in mind, the team undertook the building of a new performance-measurement system for the city. They began by posing a simple question: What do the citizens of Atlanta care about in regard to their local government? The team concluded that citizens have two major categories of concerns.

The first category involves citizens in their capacity as taxpayers and, as such, as *owners* or shareholders in city government. Like private-sector owners, taxpayers can change management (through elections), divest (by moving away), or change the mix of businesses through referenda or legislative action. Citizens as owners concern themselves with the *efficiency* of local government. They want lower taxes (that is, higher returns), and therefore they emphasize the productivity of the enterprise and the elimination of wasteful spending.

The second category involves citizens as *customers* or consumers of government services. In this role, citizens care about the scope and quality of the services being provided. In some cases, such as water and sanitation services, citizens can see a direct link between what they pay in user fees and what they receive in services. In the rest of government, such as public safety or public works, this link does not exist because these services are generally paid for from general tax receipts. In these cases, the city government's challenge is to deliver services at or above levels that citizens perceive they pay for, even though they do not know what portion of their tax bill goes to any given service. In either case, citizens demand *effectiveness* in service delivery, and the city should be concerned with how citizens perceive that effectiveness.

The team now had an approach for defining the outcomes of the new performance-measurement system: Those outcomes needed to reflect aspects of either efficiency or effectiveness. As a thought experiment, the team began to generate an inventory of potential measures, but team members quickly realized that, although the measures seemed appropriate (for instance, the quality of sidewalks, homicide rates, response time to fires, return on cash management), there were too many of them. They seemed endless.

To address this problem of abundance, the team returned to another criterion for the performance-measurement system: It should be tied to the mayor's strategic priorities. She was elected on the basis of a reform agenda, so the performance-measurement system should be able to track her success at implementing that agenda. The team revisited the mayor's four key strategic pillars:

- Improve public safety
- Improve public infrastructure
- Improve efficiency and effectiveness of city services
- Create financial stability.

For each pillar, department heads were engaged to focus on the "how" (see box 2, "Perceptions as Outcomes") That is, how did their departments' efforts link to the strategies, and what measures would those links imply? In ad-

Box 2 Perceptions as Outcomes

One of the challenges we faced in designing a performance-measurement system for Atlanta was the lack of metrics to assess success. Private companies use a mix of financial metrics—profitability, sales revenue, and market share—to understand the degree to which their customers are satisfied with their services; the public sector lacks those metrics. As a consequence, cities generally employ the "squeakiest wheel gets the grease" approach to customer satisfaction. If you complain enough, you get attention.

This approach is clearly inadequate and can lead to a serious misallocation of resources and management attention. Mayor Franklin insisted on a more scientific approach, and thus the Citizen Satisfaction Survey was born. Designed and executed by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, this survey of 600 Atlanta residents is conducted every quarter and focuses on outcome measures: Are the streets clean? Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Are there enough parks? We add the survey results to other performance measures of the relevant operating departments. As a result, not only is the police chief responsible for reducing the number of homicides and burglaries across the city, he is also responsible for ensuring that people feel safer. And the commissioner for public works is responsible not only for filling potholes, but also for ensuring that people feel the streets are in good condition.

While this may sound straightforward, it actually represented a huge leap in governance for the City of Atlanta. Being held accountable for citizens' perceptions is very different from being held accountable for executing a business process. Departmental managers now have to reconsider the mix of services they are providing, how they should cooperate with third parties to maximize the impact of their own efforts, and how they should market their services.

For example, the quality of Atlanta's streets depends on the volume of construction, cabling, and utility activity being carried out by private companies. Historically, it was not unusual for the city to completely resurface a street, only to have it torn up by private construction activity shortly thereafter. If the Department of Public Works is being measured simply by the miles of streets it resurfaces, then who cares? The managers resurfaced the street; it's not their fault that someone tore it up. However, if the department is held accountable for how citizens perceive the quality of streets, then managers have a strong incentive to coordinate their efforts with local companies to ensure the city's repaving schedule does not conflict with other street-related construction.

Outputs such as sweeping streets and fixing sidewalks are what a city does, but those outputs are only useful if they improve citizens' quality of life. We decided that the only way to know for sure whether those outputs are leading to the right outcomes is to ask citizens. Private-sector companies expend up to 15 percent of their revenues to understand and market to their customers. The least cities can do is spend a fraction of that amount on understanding whether their customers are satisfied with the services they receive.

dition, what strategies would they employ to advance these strategic priorities? What will actually be done?

From a series of conversations, strategy trees began to emerge (figure 1). For example, to improve public safety, the police chief explained that one of his department's strategies was to align the police force in geographic zones, then holding senior officers accountable for reducing crime in those zones. Success would be measured by tracking crime statistics in those zones, with success defined as the outcome of "reduced crime"—what interests the customer (citizens) as well as a solid effectiveness measure.

The same process held true for internal departments. For example, to reduce costs the city had launched an effort to improve energy efficiency in city-owned buildings. The team created an energy-usage measure for the major city buildings—a solid efficiency measure.

A Philosophically Neutral Scorecard

The scorecard that emerged from this process focused on outcomes and was operationally agnostic. The team did not attach any organizational values to the strategy tree, and so the measures generally do not reflect any philosophy regarding which customer, internal process, or employee levers should be pulled. Although department heads presumably need to address these issues within their departments, the performance-measurement system itself says nothing about how to do so. It is up to the fire chief to determine how to reduce fires; the concern of the team is only that fires be reduced.

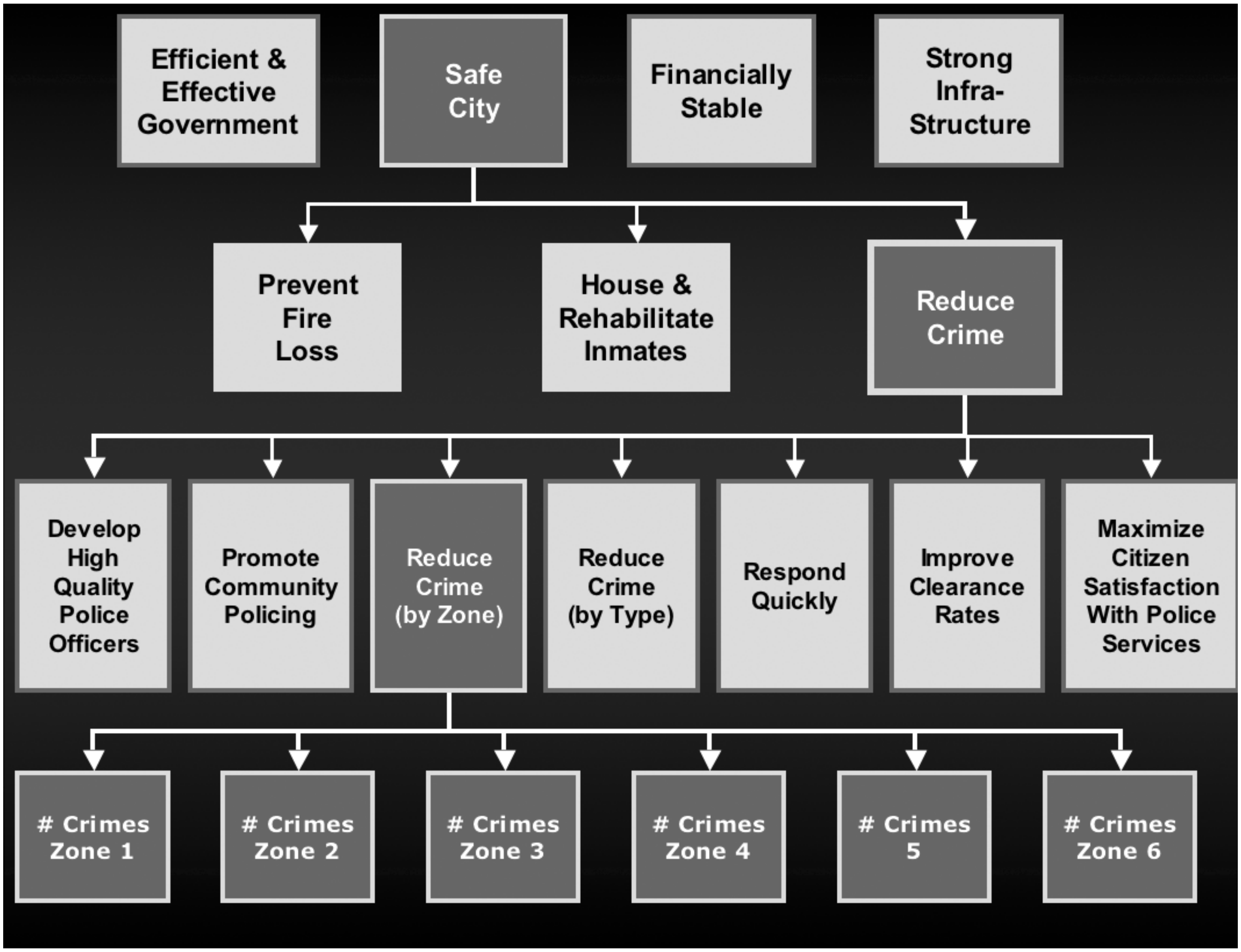
To the team's way of thinking, this approach was necessary. After conferring with both private- and public-sector users of scorecards, the team was wary of imposing an operational philosophy. Let managers manage. At the end of the day, citizens do not care whether crime is down because training has been increased, more officers are on the beat, or technology improvements have been made. It is the outcome that matters.

Even as the mayor's team sought transparency for the new scorecard, they saw no reason to provide public access to internal departmental operations, which would be the case if those operations were included in the scorecard. Omitting internal operations from the visible part of the city's scorecard focuses the system—and, it is hoped, the public's attention—on core municipal performance, not on the micromanagement of departmental affairs.

By focusing on outcomes, the team designed a performance-measurement system—subsequently dubbed the *Atlanta Dashboard*—that is relatively streamlined, yet with several useful attributes. For one, measures can be weighted to reflect their priority. In the area of public safety, for example, the components may include (1) reducing crime, (2) reducing fire loss, and (3) rehabilitating criminals, but reducing crime has a higher weight due to its greater importance in contributing to public safety. Moreover, within the area of crime reduction, specific crimes (such as homicide) may be weighted more heavily. Those weights may change over time, too, if the city's strategic priorities change. If, for example, auto thefts became of particular concern to citizens and the mayor, that measure's weight could be increased, thereby increasing the police department's focus on that measure.

Another useful attribute is that the Dashboard can be expanded vertically. The obvious example comes again from the police department, where the geographic zones that interest the mayor can be divided and subdivided to allow the police chief to track measures in more discrete units. The Dashboard can, in fact, be driven down through the organization, perhaps ultimately to personalized dashboards for each employee.

Figure 1 One Branch of the Strategy Tree to Achieve Strategic Objective of "Safe City"


Efficient & Effective Government
Safe City
Financially Stable
Strong Infra-Structure
Prevent Fire Loss
House & Rehabilitate Inmates
Reduce Crime
Develop High Quality Police Officers
Promote Community Policing
Reduce Crime (by Zone)
Reduce Crime (by Type)
Respond Quickly
Improve Clearance Rates
Maximize Citizen Satisfaction With Police Services
# Crimes Zone 1
# Crimes Zone 2
# Crimes Zone 3
# Crimes Zone 4
# Crimes 5
# Crimes Zone 6

The Dashboard also makes links and dependencies among departments far more visible to senior managers. Street cleaning provides a good example. Public works managers sometimes complain that streets are not clean because the street sweepers have not been repaired in a timely manner by the city's Department of Motor Transport Services. Department management counters that the vehicles are abused and therefore out of service more than they should be. Without a way of measuring the performance of either operation, a stalemate ensued.

The Dashboard can resolve the issue. The relevant outcome goals include (1) reported citizen satisfaction with street cleanliness and (2) departmental records on miles of streets swept. Both are shaped by the availability of street sweepers, which in turn is driven in part by the maintenance and repair of the street sweeper fleet. Maintenance and repair link street sweeping to the Department of Motor Transport Services, which, in collaboration with the public works function, has developed the goals of (1) 100 percent turnaround within 24 hours of all street sweepers receiving preventive maintenance, and (2) 100 percent turnaround within two weeks of all street sweepers receiving major repairs. In turn, the department reports "abnormal failures" due to operator abuse or the failure to bring the vehicles in for preventative maintenance. The combination of these measures allows senior management on both sides to track performance and to hold everyone accountable.

But what if the performance goals at any given step in the process do not work for some reason? For example, what if the two-week maximum for major repairs on street sweepers proves excessive, so that street sweepers are insufficiently available? If so, the performance of street sweeping, measured by miles of streets swept and customer satisfaction, will presumably fall below desired expectations. That shortfall, in turn, should prompt departmental administrators to take another look at the system, perhaps identifying the need for quicker turnaround, triggering a renegotiation of performance targets.

The Atlanta Dashboard also uses weekly meetings of the mayor's cabinet to review performance reports. Each week the performance of selected departments is reviewed against the departmental plan, with programmatic changes

Box 3 The Mayor's Cabinet Discusses Dashboard Data

At a recent meeting of the mayor's cabinet, we discussed the utility of the Dashboard in driving improvements in city services:

1. *Providing a "heads up" for potential problems.* The chief of corrections reported that daily housing of inmates was running 35 percent to 40 percent above target, posing a potential budget problem. Our chief operating officer asked, "At some point this will level off, but still at a higher level than projected, right?" "Yes," answered the corrections head, "and we have enough overtime to get through the year if this flattens out, but not if the figures go up further."

2. *Highlighting and interpreting successes.* The fire chief presented data showing the number of fires was substantially down over the average of the previous three years (which the city is using as an initial benchmark). Asked why, the chief initially credited increased training and inspections, but, in response to another question, he conceded that inspections focus on commercial buildings, whereas the decline in fires appeared to be mostly in private residences. It is also possible, he noted, that the decline was just part of a national trend toward declining fire rates.

3. *Suggesting new initiatives.* The police chief reported a spike in homicide rates—up more than 13 percent compared to 2002—but noted that murders tend to peak in July and August due to the heat. That prompted the chief operating officer to ask whether the city opens fire hydrants in the summer to cool people off. When the fire chief said no, the police chief suggested an economical sprinkler system approach he saw used in the city where he had worked previously. The fire chief indicated he would look into the possibility.

4. *Refining measures.* The human resources commissioner reported on the amount of comp time accumulated citywide and in the various departments. The chief operating officer voiced frustration with the measure as failing to reflect the city's true liability. "It would help," she suggested, "if you could overlay number of comp hours earned against number of comp hours used."

We also discussed the value of a practice the city had discontinued: requiring other department heads to listen to presentations by their peers. That practice was eliminated in the belief it took too much time for too little value, but the police–fire discussion about homicides and sprinkler systems, possible only because both departments were reviewed at the same meeting, illustrated that joint attendance can be useful. We decided that while requiring all department heads to attend is too onerous, there is value in scheduling related departments to be present at the same meeting, as the city did here by having police, fire, and corrections all presenting.

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formulated as necessary to address shortfalls. Those presentations and discussions help in interpreting the data, in targeting performance problems, and in refining the Dashboard (see box 3, "The Mayor's Cabinet Discusses Dashboard Data"). As that description suggests, the Dashboard remains a work in progress, with performance measures evolving as departments adapt to the system.

Overall, the Atlanta Dashboard embodies a number of characteristics that recommend its use. In particular, it is:

- *Strategic, not merely operational*: Measurement focuses on outcomes rather than inputs or outputs, and it links directly to the city's core business strategies.
- *Evolving and dynamic, not static*: As the city's strategic priorities change, so too can the measurement system.
- *Participatory and iterative, not top-down in development*: While the ultimate responsibility for what to measure resides with top management, input was and is solicited from all levels of the hierarchy, both to maximize information and to build ownership.
- *Tightly hierarchical, not loosely distributed in administration*: At the same time, the system is administered in a traditional hierarchical, pyramid format so that the work of individual supervisors and employees can be linked directly to performance expectations higher in the pyramid.
- *Transparent, not opaque*: The system is relatively easy to understand, even for someone with no knowledge of city government or its organization—for example, the average taxpayer or Atlanta resident.

The Atlanta Dashboard in Comparative Perspective

The Atlanta initiative represents only one of many recent initiatives by municipal governments and other public and private entities to develop comprehensive performance-measurement systems—what are sometimes termed "balanced measures" systems (Ho and Chan 2002; National Partnership for Reinventing Government 1999). The similarities and differences relative to those other systems warrant discussion to provide some perspective on the significance and value of the Atlanta approach.

The best-known of these other systems—and likely the inspiration for others—is the balanced scorecard approach, originally developed and popularized for the private sector by Robert Kaplan and David Norton (1992), then adapted for municipal use by cities such as Charlotte (Kaplan 1998). The balanced scorecard is designed to give "top managers a fast but comprehensive view of the business" by presenting in one place a broad range of indicators of finances, customer satisfaction, and other aspects of business performance. "Think of the balanced scorecard," Kaplan and Norton (1992, 71–72) argue, "as the dials and indicators in an airplane cockpit. For the complex task of navigating and flying an airplane, pilots need detailed information about many aspects of the flight.… Similarly, the complexity of managing an organization today requires that managers be able to view performance in several areas simultaneously." Those "several areas" reflect four important but distinct perspectives on the business:

- The customer perspective: How do customers see us?
- Internal business perspective: What must we excel at?
- Innovation and learning: Can we continue to improve and create value?
- Financial: How do we look to shareholders?

Together, the four perspectives provide a comprehensive view of organizational performance.

The balanced scorecard also holds the potential, Kaplan and Norton argue in a later article (1996), to "address a serious deficiency in traditional management systems: their inability to link a company's long-term strategy with its short-term actions" (75). That link could be achieved by developing four new management processes to complement the four measurement perspectives:

- Translating the vision: Building consensus around the vision among top management.
- Communicating and linking: Communicating the vision up and down the organization.
- Business planning: Making business plans that reflect the vision.
- Feedback and learning: Learning from data feedback to confirm or modify strategies.

The Atlanta Dashboard embodies some of the principles of the balanced scorecard. First, the Dashboard includes both owner/shareholder and customer perspectives, comparable to the balanced scorecard's financial and customer perspectives. In that regard, the balanced scorecard is superior to other private-sector approaches that focus only on profitability. Second, like the balanced scorecard, the Dashboard creates links to broader organizational strategies through its concern for how performance measures relate to the mayor's strategies. Third, the term "Dashboard" itself can be seen as derived from the scorecard metaphor.

The similarities end there because there is really nothing balanced about the Atlanta Dashboard. Where the balanced scorecard dictates the central administration's interest and ability to look closely at the internal workings of the various departments—the internal business and innovation and learning perspectives—the Dashboard ignores those perspectives entirely. Similarly with links to organizational strategy, the Dashboard concerns itself with translating and communicating the vision, but not with either business planning or feedback and learning.

The mayor's team in Atlanta chose not to extend the Dashboard's reach to these organizational dimensions for reasons suggested earlier. First, given the diversity of cultures across different municipal departments, team members felt that each department would have its own idiosyncratic views on the optimal mix of internal business and human resources practices, including employee training and development. Imposing a standardized system from above would force those different cultures to fit the same rigid system. Second, the mayor's team preferred to give departments maximum latitude to achieve performance targets. What is important, they felt, was that departments achieve the desired outcomes—less crime, cleaner streets, etc. Let departmental administrators operate their departments in whatever manner they think best, so long as they produce the promised outcomes. Third, even as the mayor's team wanted municipal performance to become transparent to the public, they did not necessarily want the public to have access to all internal departmental workings, as a balanced scorecard system would do. Finally, the mayor's team saw a sufficient challenge in the need to review all municipal outcomes without assuming the additional burden of examining internal departmental processes.

The experience of Charlotte, North Carolina, perhaps the highest-profile U.S. city to adopt a balanced scorecard, hints at some support for Atlanta's choices in this regard. While reporting an overall positive assessment of the system, Charlotte found adoption—and adaptation—of the balanced scorecard to be extremely time consuming, with one official saying that she had "underestimated the amount of change required to implement this strategic measurement approach" (Kaplan 1998, 8). Atlanta, of course, sidestepped some of that time commitment by focusing—at the top level anyway—only on outcome measures, not on internal business processes. Atlanta officials saw uncertain connections between some of the internal process and customer perspective outcome measures included in the Charlotte balanced scorecard. They also saw the potential for internal process perspectives to vary among departments.

The city of Baltimore, Maryland, offers an entirely different approach through its CitiStat program. In developing this system, Mayor Martin J. O'Malley "sought to build the kind of information management and control system that would enhance the capacity of city agencies to identify, respond to, and anticipate problems as they were emerging" (Henderson 2003, 12). CitiStat employs geographic mapping tools to track activity measures (for instance, animal carcasses collected, missed garbage pickups) across the city. In this sense, CitiStat—like its analogue CompStat used by police departments around the country—is an operations-management tool that provides managers with nearly real-time data on departmental activities. The utility of these systems rests largely in day-to-day operations management, where data can be used to respond to problems identified on the ground by rapidly redeploying resources. While these tools are useful for managers, they generally do not serve as true scorecards wherein targets for strategic outcomes are established and performance against those targets is tracked.

In looking at the various balanced measures systems that have proliferated in recent years (National Partnership for Reinventing Government 1999), a larger model for performance management begins to take shape. Although these systems use different approaches and achieve different goals, and each contributes in its own way to what might be a collective solution, balanced scorecards, like the one used in Charlotte, tend to set strategic direction by tying together a loose set of management goals and philosophies (better employee development, focus on the customer, etc). Management dashboards, such as the Atlanta Dashboard, translate that strategic direction into a set of specific strategic outcomes that are tracked and monitored. Operations-assessment tools, like CitiStat, make sure day-to-day operations are functioning properly and are focused on achieving those strategic outcomes. In the end, cities need a combination of all three to truly achieve top-level performance.

Conclusion

Paralleling the efforts of many other municipalities, Mayor Shirley Franklin has undertaken the development of a new performance-measurement system, the Atlanta Dashboard. The Dashboard is designed to provide a vehicle for comprehensive reporting, review, and analysis of the how well the city's various operating agencies are performing. It is an essential element of Mayor Franklin's efforts to reform city government and to develop a new operating model for the city. (The Dashboard is now available to the public at http://www.atlantaga.gov/mayor/dashboard.aspx.)

The Atlanta Dashboard resembles a number of other contemporary balanced measures systems (National Partnership for Reinventing Government 1999), but it is unique in many respects. Compared to the popular balanced scorecard approach, for example, the Dashboard omits all aspects of internal business processes in favor of the exclusive concern for outcomes. That choice gives departments more latitude in how to reach performance goals, while at the same time saving top management from having to scrutinize the internal operations of many different departments.

We believe the Atlanta Dashboard may be useful to other cities. To be sure, the uniqueness of every city means that no performance-measurement system is likely to fit without some adaptation, and other forms of balanced measures systems also merit attention. Still, many cities seem to have needs similar to those that drove Atlanta officials to develop the Dashboard. Cities that see themselves mirrored in Atlanta's needs may be well advised to examine the Atlanta Dashboard more closely.

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